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THE HEBREW VIEW OF SIN

HENRY PRESERVED SMITH
Meadville Theological School

The theologian is constantly tempted to read the monuments of the past in the light of present experience. And in no case is this temptation more strongly felt than in the discussion of the important topic of sin. Generations of pious men have elaborated a clear-cut doctrine of sin, regarded as apostasy from God, and they have then found this doctrine everywhere enunciated in Scripture. Even treatises on biblical theology have not always escaped the influence of this strongly established tradition. For this reason there seems to be room for a fresh investigation of the facts, and this is attempted in the following paper.

Lexical tradition assigns to the common Hebrew word for sin (חטא) the primitive meaning, "he missed the mark." One passage in the Old Testament seems to support this definition, where we read: "Every one could sling a stone at a hair and not *miss*."¹ But noticing that the verb is pointed as a *hiphil* we see that there is no reason for departing from the usual meaning. What the author meant was that the archer did not *make the arrow go wrong*. The Arabic lexicographers, who are commonly cited in favor of the alleged primitive meaning, know quite well that the word means "he did wrong." They do indeed cite instances where the archer makes the arrow go wrong, and they also cite cases where the verb apparently means "he strayed from the road." They are careful to add, however, that this may be done intentionally or unintentionally, which disproves the alleged primitive meaning; for no one misses the mark or the road intentionally. The fact that here also the causative form of the verb is used shows that the Arab thought of the man who strayed from the path as *spoiling the trail*, confusing it, making it wrong.

We cannot get farther back toward primitive usage than than

¹ Judg. 20:16.

to say the verb means simply "to go wrong," or "to be in the wrong," whether this comes about through heedlessness (the Arab uses the word of the boiling over of a pot), by mistake, or by malice prepense. The Koran agrees with this, for on the one hand it calls Pharaoh, Haman, Joseph's brothers, and Potiphar's wife by the name "sinners," and on the other allows that in case of unintentional error ("sin") forgiveness may be granted.

A large number of Old Testament passages show that a sin is anything which puts a man in the wrong with reference to another man, which offends him. Pharaoh's butler and baker offend their master, and are put into prison. Laban pursues Jacob and reminds him that he is able to do him an injury. Jacob expostulates: "What is my trespass? What is my sin that thou hast hotly pursued me?" Similarly Abimelech to Abraham: "What have I done to thee, and what have I sinned against thee, that thou hast brought upon me and my kingdom a great sin?" David raises the same question when convinced of Saul's enmity. Jephthah's argument with the Ammonites turns on the point whether there has been actual injury (sin) to justify the war. Judah will be a sinner against his father if he does not bring Benjamin back to him, and Bathsheba asserts that if Adonijah comes to the throne she and Solomon will be sinners. In no one of these cases is there a question of violation of positive law, or of deviation from a moral standard. The only thing which the writer has in mind is that there has been offense of one person by another. Similarly, when Hezekiah confesses to Sennacherib that he has sinned, he does not mean that he did not act in good conscience in revolting, but that events have put him in the power of his adversary. To this extent only is he in the wrong.²

Emphasis is evidently laid upon the fact that an offense has been committed, and not at all upon the motive of the offender. Moreover it is assumed that the offended party will take his revenge without stopping to inquire into motive. The avenger of blood will pursue the manslayer, and the common conscience justifies him in taking life for life without allowing any plea in mitigation.

² The cases cited are so familiar that I have not thought it necessary to give references.

Moreover the solidarity of the clan is such that the offense against one becomes an offense against all. Here is where the poor man, the client, or the slave finds his security. The poor man can appeal to his more powerful brother, the client can claim the aid of his patron, and the slave that of his master to avenge him of his adversary. As every violation of tribal custom involves offense of some member of the clan there is a standard of morality, but not a code of law in our sense of the words.

Offenses against the divinity are regarded from the same point of view with offenses against men. Direct infringement of his rights will of course call out his anger. Uzzah's well-meant grasping of the Ark was a sin. So was David's intrusion into the sphere of the divine knowledge in taking the census. The tragedy of the house of Eli was brought about by the conduct of his sons who despised the sacred offerings. Their father warns them that it is more dangerous to offend God than to offend man: "If a man sin against a man God will arbitrate the matter; but if a man sin against Yahweh, who can intercede for him?" Jonathan ate a little honey on which a taboo rested, and the God demanded his life as a penalty, though the trespass was done in entire ignorance. The people sinned against Yahweh in eating with the blood because the blood is Yahweh's portion. The non-payment of vows is of course a sin because it withholds what belongs to Yahweh. Pharaoh's sin against Yahweh consists in forbidding his people to make the pilgrimage and pay their dues at the sanctuary. As in the cases of an offense against men the emphasis is laid not at all upon the motive but upon the fact of an injury having been done. The injury may be by words as well as by deeds. Job fears that his sons may have sinned by cursing God in their hearts, and the crowning proof of Job's own righteousness is that he did not sin with his lips or charge God with injustice.

As the divinity is a member of the clan he may be offended by any breach of tribal morality. The human members of the clan are in fact his clients, and may count on his help to vindicate them against overbearing tribesmen and also against strangers. So Abraham was protected even when we should pronounce him in the wrong. Yahweh thus taking the part of the weaker party became

the guardian of tribal morality. The most striking case is that of Uriah. David seems to have had no scruples about his conduct in this matter until Yahweh interfered directly—was not the subject in the power of the king? But Yahweh looked upon Uriah as his client and took his part. Then David recognized that he had sinned against Yahweh. From this point of view we understand the preaching of the earlier prophets. The sins of the people were not violations of some published code of morality—no such code is appealed to. They consisted in trespass upon the rights of the widow, the orphan, and the client, who were recognized by Yahweh as under his care. It is sometimes said that the wrath of Yahweh is roused only by those offenses which break the covenant between him and his people. But there is no evidence that these sins of which the prophets speak were regarded as breaches of the covenant. All that is assumed is that the rights of those who cannot protect themselves are cared for by God. Even the rights of foreigners are thus protected. Joseph would sin against God if he trespassed upon the marital rights of his master. The men of Sodom were sinners against Yahweh in that they violated the common-sense of decency, as well as the rights of hospitality. Damascus, Edom, and Moab are denounced because they have outraged humanity by their cruelty.

Up to this point we have no reason to suppose that the Old Testament writers conceived sin as apostasy from God or transgression of his law. Sin is anything which offends a person, and God is prominent in the thought of the writers because he is the most powerful person whom one is in danger of offending. It is clear, however, that at some point in history the idea that sin is transgression of a divine command comes in. It is probable that this view became prominent only after the establishment of the monarchy. And it is probable that case-law preceded a code or body of statutes. We have already seen that the divinity was appealed to, to arbitrate between man and man. What this means is set before us in the account of Moses' activity as minister of the oracle: "The people come to me to inquire of God; when they have a suit they come to me and I judge between a man and his fellow." The context shows that the judgment was given by the

prophet in the name of Yahweh. In this state of affairs disregard of the judgment of Yahweh would be an offense against him and call forth his wrath. When the king became chief justice of the nation disobedience to his direct commands was also reckoned among the chief sins. Apparently a considerable time elapsed after the establishment of the monarchy before the necessity was felt of collecting the scattered decisions and commands of the king in a code. The Deuteronomic writers, however, saw that it would be well to define in white and black the rights of Yahweh and to record his judgments. It is they who define sin to be disregard of the judgments and disobedience to the statutes, and to this they add violation of the covenant.

It needs no argument to show that the violation of the covenant is direct trespass on the rights of Yahweh. The covenant gave him an exclusive claim on the worship of the people. Defection from him roused his jealousy. Jeremiah holds that Israel has gone beyond the gentiles in depravity because they have exchanged their God for another. Hosea had already compared their sin to that of the wife who is unfaithful to her husband. The reason for all the calamities which befell Judah is found in this: "Your fathers forsook me and walked after other gods and served them." The Deuteronomic writer paraphrases this: "They made him jealous by strangers and provoked him by abominations." The later literature is full of such accusations.

It is obvious that we have got to a point where the intention is recognized as determining the quality of the act. Disobedience to a specific command of Yahweh cannot be unwitting. Thus Saul in sparing Agag must have been cognizant of what he was doing, though he could hardly have fully realized the consequences which would follow. The case of the people in the wilderness who so often refused to obey the command of Moses, and who chronically murmured against their God is similar. Disloyalty is emphasized: "How long will this people despise me and how long will they not believe in me in spite of all the wonders which I have done in the midst of them?" In Jeremiah also the sin of Israel comes from the fact that the people walk in the stubbornness of their evil heart. On the other hand, Yahweh was gratified by the willingness of the

people to hear the instructions of Moses, and wished that there might be such a heart in them to fear him always.

Such passages show that there was a correct apprehension of sin as a state of mind. But it still remains true that when the Hebrew writer used the word *sin* he thought rather of the fact that an offense had been committed than of the state of mind of the offending party. Evidence of this is found in the prominence given to unwitting offenses, especially in the later literature. With the best intention in the world it was still possible to be a sinner. To understand the anxiety of the believer on the subject of unwitting sin we must remember the traditional right of the offended party to compensation, regardless of the intention which lay behind the act. If the injured person does not take the *talio* he must be satisfied by a money payment. In other words, a sin creates a claim, and the sinner rests under this as a debt until satisfaction is given. The idea is well expressed by Mohammed: "The soul charged with the load of its actions shall not bear that of another," and again: "The unbelievers say to the believers, We will carry your sins; but they shall not carry any part of their sins, for they are liars; but they shall surely carry their own burdens."³ In the Old Testament we read that the man who curses his God shall "carry his sin," and Yahweh found the sin of Sodom very heavy. Although, as we see from these instances, the load is called sin, the more common word for it is "guilt" (עֲוֹן). The people who disobeyed in the wilderness "carried their guilt" forty years. Isaiah sees his people loaded down with guilt, and declares that they drag guilt along with cords of falsehood, and sin with a cart-ropes. Cain finds his guilt too heavy to bear, and the context shows that he is thinking not of the load upon his conscience, but of the liability to be slain by some avenger.

The point here is that the load of guilt, however it has been contracted, is realistically conceived as resting upon the offender until it can be removed. It rests not alone upon the offender. The solidarity of the clan or nation is such that the offense of one becomes the offense of all. Abimlech knew that if he had invaded Abraham's rights he would have brought sin upon his whole king-

³ Koran 39:9 and 29:11.

dom. Aaron brought guilt upon the community by making the calf, though we may remark that in this case the community took part in the sin. Achan, however, by his sin infected the whole people, though they were in ignorance of the transgression for which they suffered. The Deuteronomist warns his reader not to make the land sin, and the context shows that he is not thinking of the evil example but of the guilt contracted by the individual infecting the community. When Abigail, and afterward the woman of Tekoa, politely offer to take David's guilt upon themselves they are of course thinking that there is no actual danger, but the form of speech shows that the thought of transference of guilt was not foreign to the people. The Law declares that one should rebuke his neighbor if he sees him sinning, otherwise he will "bear sin" because of him. Especially prominent in the thought of reflecting men was the burden of guilt which descended from father to son. The bloodshed by Saul rested upon his house until the debt was discharged. The exiled Jews therefore, in complaining that the fathers had eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth were set on edge, had tradition on their side. The Levitical writer draws a somber picture of the people in the captivity pining away in the guilt of their fathers. To the people who so vividly realized the burden or debt of sin the important question was whether this load could be removed. The answer of the Law was that it could, if it had been unwittingly contracted.

To understand the treatment of this question we need to take account of a class of passages which we have hitherto left out of our discussion. These visualize sin, not as a burden but as a stain, not as a debt but as a defilement. This idea is of course ancient. Priestly tradition had always thought of certain things as "taboo," that is, contrary to the worship of Yahweh. The man infected by a taboo must not approach the sanctuary, for the sanctity of Yahweh reacted against the thing taboo and destroyed it. It is Ezekiel who among Old Testament writers first distinctly identified sins with things ritually unclean. He classes all sins as "abominations"—a distinctly ritual term, designating whatever is contrary to the nature of the divinity. In his view the reason why Israel was given over to the enemy was that the people had

made Yahweh's house intolerable to him by these uncleannesses. The kings had brought their foreign slaves into the temple and had buried their dead in its immediate vicinity. Therefore Yahweh does not hesitate to say: "They have polluted my land with the carcasses of their detestable things and have filled mine inheritance with their abominations."

That sin and defilement are identified must be evident from many passages. Thus the priest *takes sin upon himself* if he eats anything which dies of itself or that is torn by beasts, or if he touches anything that has been in contact with a dead body—all ritual offenses. And it must be evident that the whole group of words which speak of cleansing, washing away, purifying, wiping out sin or guilt are based upon the ritual conception, for these words originally referred to acts of lustration performed at the sanctuary or at least commanded by the priest. It is the business of the minister of the sanctuary to inform men what they must do in order to approach the Divinity in an acceptable manner, and this involves the removal of whatever defilements they have contracted. The blame of Judah's calamities is laid upon the priests because they have been lax in this duty: "Her priests did violence to my tora, and profaned my sacred things; they did not distinguish between sacred and common, and they did not instruct concerning clean and unclean . . . so I was profaned in the midst of them." In giving the instruction here referred to the priests were guided by a tradition which had come down from antiquity, and which of course became more elaborate as time went on. The codification of this tradition showed the earnestness of the post-exilic community in the endeavor to make their land fit for the dwelling of Yahweh. They would guard against everything which would disturb the sacred character of the land. In the literal sense Israel was to be a kingdom of priests; all the members of the community were to be consecrated persons, living in a consecrated land. This was why Yahweh had separated them from all the nations: "You shall therefore make a distinction between clean beast and unclean, and between clean fowl and unclean; and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or bird or anything wherewith the ground teems, which I have sepa-

rated from you as unclean; and you shall be sacred to me, for I, Yahweh, am sacred." The danger of contamination under such a system needs no demonstration.

What we have to note is that these defilements are offenses against the Divinity just as truly as any of the ethical transgressions against which the prophets inveigh. In fact the Hebrew writers themselves do not always make clear whether a particular sin is trespass upon the rights of God or man, or disobedience of a statute, or ritual uncleanness. When they speak of Achan's sin they call it a trespass as though the invasion of Yahweh's property rights were in question. But the course of the narrative shows that the contagion of a taboo laid upon the devoted thing was what infected not Achan alone but the whole camp. The frequent denunciation of polytheism is based not alone on the idea that worship of another god is disloyalty to Yahweh, but also on the thought that the rites of another divinity are highly taboo. The broth of abominable things of which these worshipers partook brought them into communion with the demons, and they could not partake of the cup of Yahweh and at the same time of the cup of these others. From this point of view we understand the pitilessness with which the Deuteronomists command that all the inhabitants of an idolatrous city shall be exterminated, and that all their property shall be destroyed by fire. The whole is something infected, contact with which would be dangerous.

When the priestly view prevailed, it is evident that the tendency to a strictly ethical conception according to which sin is in the intention, must receive a setback. In a world full of things unclean, defilement is certain to be contracted in spite of the most strenuous efforts to avoid it. Yet if contracted it is dangerous not only to the infected person but also to the whole community. Fortunately the priestly tradition not only defined what constituted impurity; it also prescribed means by which impurity might be removed. First of all the community may be cleansed by the expulsion of the infected member. The leper, he who has an issue, the one who is defiled by contact with a corpse, must be shut out of the camp, so long as the defilement lasts. Those who of set purpose commit any of the graver offenses against Yahweh

are to be excommunicated permanently, or else put to death—for our present purpose it is not necessary to inquire which alternative is contemplated by the Law. Thirty-six different crimes are specified as entailing this penalty, and the list shows the complete fusion of the ethical and the ritual point of view. For we find, side by side with incest, blasphemy, and idolatry, the purely ritual offenses of eating the sacrificial flesh when unclean, eating fat or blood, and eating leavened bread in Passover. Where, however, these acts are committed in ignorance, and wherever defilement is contracted by the accidents of human life the infected person may be purified by an offering.

The close connection of the offerings prescribed for these cases with the subject of sin is indicated by their names. One of them is called *hattath* from the verb we have studied; the other is the *asham*, from a root meaning “to be guilty” or “to trespass.” We may conjecture that originally both of them were intended to make good some damage that has been done, being in fact money payments discharging the debt, which, as we have seen, rests upon every offender. The *asham* appears in connection with the return of the Ark from the country of the Philistines, where those who have had it in charge and have experienced the anger of Yahweh make acknowledgment of their wrong by a gift of golden mice. In another passage we learn that the priests were authorized to receive the money of the *asham* and the money of the *hattath*. It does not seem violent to interpret both words as designating damages assessed upon an offender against ritual tradition. As is the case in our legal use of the word “damages,” the same term is used to designate the trespass and the payment which is to make good the trespass. In the case of the *hattath* it seems possible to trace the steps by which the word passed from one meaning to the other. Our starting-point must be the activity of the priest already alluded to, his activity in determining whether the layman was fit to approach the Divinity. In this way he distinguished between clean and unclean. If he found his client unclean he must instruct him how to get rid of the infection. The same verb is used to designate both acts—pronouncing the man unclean, and relieving him of the disability. The verb used is the intensive stem of the root we have been considering.

When Jacob expostulated with Laban for the way in which he had been treated he said: "That which was torn by beasts I brought not to thee; I bore the loss of it." The verb translated "I bore the loss of it" means "I unsinned it." The same verb is used in the ritual for the house infected by what is called leprosy. The house is to be "unsinned" or "undefiled" (to coin words that will represent the idea) by a purifying rite, similar to the one used in the case of a human leper.⁴ Whether demonistic beliefs originally underlay the ritual does not now concern us, for the documents make no use of such beliefs. They content themselves with codifying the practices which remove the defilement. When the ashes of a burnt heifer are sprinkled on the man who has been in contact with a dead body they "unsin" or "undefile" him. Ezekiel uses the same verb to describe the cleansing both of the altar and of the sanctuary which alone will make them fit for the service. Parallel is the command to Moses to "unsin" the altar of the tabernacle before consecrating it, and in this case it is distinctly said that the rite is accomplished by the *hattath*.

The cleansing of the leper has been referred to, and may be looked at a little more closely. Two distinct ceremonies are enjoined. The first takes place outside the camp and is performed with two birds. One of these is slain, the other bird is dipped in its blood, and some of the blood is sprinkled on the convalescent. The living bird is then allowed to go free. Demonistic ideas are here in evidence. The blood of the slain bird is the means of communion between the man and the living bird, the effect of which is to transfer whatever uncanny influence still lingers about the man from him to the bird which then flies away with it. This preliminary ceremony is separated by an interval of seven days from the one which follows it. This second one brings the man into communion with Yahweh, for at its conclusion he offers a burnt-offering, showing his full right in the congregation. This communion is effected by an *asham*, probably because it is assumed that during his separation the man has not paid all his dues at the sanctuary. The significance of the ceremony is seen in the application of the blood of the offering to the right ear, the right thumb, and the right great toe of the offerer. Moreover there is a rite

⁴ Lev. 14:49 and 52.

of consecration with oil: "The priest shall take some of the log of oil and pour it into the palm of his left hand, and the priest shall dip his forefinger in the oil which is in his left hand, and shall sprinkle the oil with his finger seven times before Yahweh, and of the rest of the oil the priest shall put some on the tip of the right ear of him that is to be cleansed, and on his right thumb, and on his right toe, over the blood of the *asham*; and the rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put upon the head of him who is cleansed." The parallel with the consecration of the priest has often been noted. In that case also the blood of an offering (here called the consecration offering) is applied to the right ear, thumb, and great toe of the priest, and the sacred oil is poured over his head as well as sprinkled on his garments. If the idea of consecration is present in the case of the priest it must also be present in the case of the leper. Oil is said, in fact, to effect the consecration both of the tent and of the priests.⁵

Though *asham* and *hattath* were originally intended to compensate for some damage or trespass, both have now become means of purification. Their sacredness is such that they counteract the innumerable taboos which may infect men or things. It is because this purifying effect is common to both classes that they are so imperfectly distinguished by the Levitical writers. In one instance they seem to be actually identified, for we read that he who has discovered his fault "shall bring his *asham* to Yahweh for his sin which he has sinned, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid, for a *hattath*." In another passage "water of *hattath*" is evidently water of purification.⁶ It is not without reason, therefore, that Josephus says: "The Law has ordained several *purifications* at our sacrifices," and relates that Moses *purified* the priests with water from perennial springs and "with such sacrifices as are usually offered to God on such occasions." Josephus was well aware that Jewish and gentile ideas on this subject were very similar. Greek religion laid much stress upon purifications; purifying sacrifices were offered at the opening of the festivals;

⁵ Lev. 8:10-12, 22 f. The rite of cleansing for the leper is contained in Lev. 14:1-32.

⁶ Num. 8:7; cf. Lev. 5:6.

those who had attended a funeral and were therefore defiled were cleansed by sacrificial blood; the altar itself was cleansed by sprinkling with blood.⁷

The rigor of the Pentateuchal theory is evident. The code was compiled for a community of the faithful who are supposed always to have the will to obey. The sin unto death, that is, any disobedience which is committed with full knowledge, is to be punished with death or excommunication: "There is no forgiveness for the sin unto death," says the Book of Jubilees, and the New Testament parallel will occur to everyone. Judith tells Holofernes that if the people of Bethulia once trespass on the sacred things, even under pressure of famine, they will surely be destroyed. It is for the ignorances only of the Jews that the angels make intercession. The first effect of the stringency was to extend the definition of unwitting sin so as to include a good deal which could not be said to be done in ignorance. So long as the believer was conscious of an intention to keep the Law he could hope that his errors would be charged to ignorance. The protestations of innocence and uprightness which we read in some of the Psalms become more intelligible if we remember that the authors mean to assert that they have not sinned with a high hand, that is, with malice prepense.

It follows that where there was a genuine conviction of sin recourse was not had to the sin-offerings for relief. That there was real conviction of sin in the Jewish community is abundantly evident. Tender consciences had their sensitiveness heightened by the thought that even unwitting sins might bring calamity upon the community, and they were further depressed by the continuing misfortunes of their people which they interpreted as the evidence that the burden of past sins had not yet been lifted. Daniel voices the convictions of the pious when he says: "We have sinned and dealt perversely, have done wickedly and have rebelled, even turning aside from thy commandments and thine ordinances, neither have we hearkened to thy servants the prophets." In like manner the second Isaiah: "Our rebellions are many before thee, and our

⁷ Numerous citations will be found in Wächter, *Reinheitsvorschriften im griechischen Kult*, and also in Stengel, *Opferbräuche der Griechen*.

sins testify against us; for our rebellions are present with us and as for our guiltinesses we know them—transgressing and denying Yahweh, turning away from following God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.” On the basis of the priest-code these authors must give up hope, for, as we have seen, this code has nothing but excommunication for those who sin in the sense of these confessions.

As if to give us double assurance that the hope of forgiveness was not based on the ritual the most penitent of these writers take pains to tell us that God does not desire burnt-offering or sin-offering. The ground of their conviction is of course that the prophets had been, if anything, hostile to the sacrificial service. The priest-code alone never was the law of the Jews. They had along with it the other books, and the teachings of these books on the subject of sin and forgiveness had great influence on the spiritually minded. The priest-code was taken at its face value, as showing the way of purification for those who made mistakes or were uninstructed. But forgiveness for sin in the proper sense of the term was looked for on quite other than ritual grounds.

The prophets though, as we have said, opposed to the ritual and even denouncing it as valueless in the sight of God, were yet very positive that forgiveness will be granted to those who seek it. Even Jeremiah, the most pessimistic of them, holds out the hope of pardon. But the forgiveness will be an act of free grace and not conditioned by sacrifice. Ezekiel, the most ritualistic of the prophets, agrees with the others: “Not for your sake [certainly not for the sake of your sacrifices we might read between the lines] but for my sacred name’s sake do I act,” is his frequent assertion. The same prophet insists that all that the sinner has to do is to turn from his evil ways. This is the more significant in that to his view the sins of the people are all defilements, and ritual cleansing is necessary to the communion of Yahweh with his people. The messianic time will be distinguished by the punctilious care with which the purifying sacrifices will be offered. But before this time comes there will be an act of free forgiveness—a purification graciously ministered by God himself: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean; from all

your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you; a new heart also will I give you and a new spirit will I put in you."

The narrative books lay no stress on sacrifices as a condition of forgiveness. The recalcitrant people who so tried Yahweh's patience in the wilderness were frequently forgiven, but not on the ground of expiatory sacrifices. The intercession of Moses is by prayer and expostulation without rites or ceremonies. Even in the striking scene where Aaron saves the people from annihilation by prompt intervention it is the sacred incense which is effective and not a sacrifice of any sort. The crime of David, serious as it was and impossible to excuse on the ground of ignorance, was forgiven when he confessed it and no mention is made of sacrifice. The prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple assumes that Yahweh will forgive when the sinner prays toward the place. With reference to the Jews of the dispersion this was of course a distinct benefit, for it was physically impossible for them to bring the sin-offering if such had been required. But this cannot be the reason why the sin-offerings are ignored in so many passages. If the sin-offerings had been necessary to forgiveness (in the mind of the priestly writers, I mean) they would have been insisted on in spite of considerations of mere convenience. All that the prophetic theologian requires of the wicked man is that he forsake his way and turn unto Yahweh and he will abundantly pardon. The Sibylline oracle does not require even the gentile convert to bring a reconciling sacrifice, but urges him only to give up murder and bathe the whole body in running water, and stretching out hands to heaven to pray for forgiveness for former deeds, and to reconcile with praise to God the former bitterness.⁸

Doubtless the priestly writers were moved by the expectation that in the time to come the people would receive the supernatural cleansing promised by Ezekiel. Instead of making the forgiveness of the people depend upon the sacrifices, they believed that the forgiveness would come first, after which there would be no intentional sin and all that would be needed would be purification from unintentional or accidental defilement. Was it not written that

⁸ That in a few cases Yahweh is said to have been mollified by a burnt-offering does not invalidate what has been said.

Yahweh would forgive the guilt of the people and remember their sin no more, after which he would enter into a new covenant with them, writing his laws in their hearts? In the confidence that the messianic time was just at hand the great evangelical prophet assures Zion: "I am he who blots out thy rebellions for my own sake and I will not remember thy sins," and again: "I have blotted out as a cloud thy transgressions, and as a thick mist thy sins." In like manner the Psalmists declare that God has forgiven guilt, has covered up sin, has turned from the fierceness of his wrath. Every favorable turn of the national fortune was taken as an earnest of the good time coming, but the benefits which the people tasted by anticipation were in no sense conditioned by the sacrificial system.

And if these writers did not make forgiveness conditional upon the bringing of a sin-offering, it is also true that the ritual itself does not require repentance as necessary on the part of the offerer. This is not clear to many Bible readers, and the commentators think it necessary to read between the lines and they assure us that repentance is presupposed. But it is strange that this is nowhere stated in so many words. The distinctive word "repent" is not found in connection with the sacrificial rules. In connection with the trespass-offering it is indeed once said that the offerer shall *confess*. But this is only because the amount of the trespass must be made known before the priest can tell whether the man is in fact conforming to the law. Affliction of soul is commanded for the great Day of Atonement, but even here it is not said that men must be sorry for their sins. The critical nature of the day is sufficient to account for the somber mood of the worshipers without supposing any distinct repentance. The priestly writers only showed their consistency in thus ignoring the subject of repentance, for they provided purification for unwitting sins only, and a man cannot in any just sense repent of a defilement which he has contracted without intent.

Why then, it will be asked, is so much emphasis laid on the sacrificial system? The answer must be plain: the emphasis was the emphasis laid upon the observance of the Law as a whole. In all its parts the Law is the will of God, and to break one of the

least of the commandments is to incur his wrath. The pious Jew rejoices not that the sacrifices have obtained forgiveness for him, but that his obedience has been accepted. When he is conscious that he has fallen short he finds relief in confession and prayer, knowing that the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. There was no doubt a vivid sense of the value of the purifications, which value consisted in their keeping the people in communion with Yahweh. But this value did not inhere in the sin-offerings in any special sense. The head-band of Aaron takes away the guilt of the sacred things; the daily burnt-offering preserves the covenant.

Evidence that it was really the observance of the Law which was emphasized may be found in the Wisdom literature. Here, as is well known, special attention was given to the ethical precepts of the Law, and it is even held that guilt may be removed by attention to these. "By kindness and fidelity guilt is erased," says Proverbs, and Ben Sira is in harmony: "As water quenches fire so righteousness will obliterate sin." The same author credits piety toward a father with equal potency. Daniel exhorts Nebuchadnezzar to redeem his sins by righteousness, and his guilt by showing mercy to the poor. Tobit believes that before the Most High mercy is a good sacrifice, and that beneficence saves from death and cleanses every sin. According to the Psalms of Solomon the righteous man atones (compensates) for unwitting sin by fasting and humbling his soul. These writers do not reject the sacrificial service, as is shown by Ben Sira, who exhorts to the faithful performance of the sacrifices as something commanded, at the same time warning his reader not to trust to their efficacy too implicitly.

It is only in this later period of the history that we get the familiar definition of sin as disobedience or any want of conformity (intentional or unintentional) to the Law of God. And when we go farther and say that sin is any deviation from the perfect ethical standard embodied in the Law, we go beyond what is written. In fact the Jew did not inquire whether the Law embodied the perfect ethical standard or not. The Law embodied the will of God for Israel; that was enough for the faithful, and any inquiry into its reason or its conformity with man's ethical ideas was

rationalism. It is astonishing that this should be ignored when Ezekiel in plain terms says that Yahweh had given the people laws that were ethically indefensible: "I gave them statutes not good, and judgments in which they should not live, and polluted them with their gifts in making them sacrifice every firstborn, that I might make them guilty, that they might know that I am Yahweh."⁹ The declaration of the Psalmist that the judgments of Yahweh are truth, only shows the variety of conceptions with which we have to deal.

After what has been said it is hardly necessary to ask whether the animal victim in the sacrifices (specifically in the sin-offering) was a substitute for the offerer, suffering the penalty which should have been visited on the man. The question may be touched upon, however, because Babylonian analogies seem to favor the strictly vicarious theory. The case is this: In some Babylonian rites of healing an animal is slain, and the body is brought into contact with the sick man. The demon of disease is then begged to accept the life of the animal for the life of the man, after which the disease is supposed to leave the man and take possession of the animal carcass. The texts seem specifically to assert that the animal is a substitute for the man. Such assertions are conspicuous, however, by their absence in the case of the Hebrew sin-offering. Various cases of substitution do indeed occur in the Old Testament. The most easily explained is the ram which took the place of Isaac in the story of the testing of Abraham. The story is intended to justify the provision of the Law which allowed the firstborn son to be redeemed instead of being sacrificed. But this is not a case of substitutionary atonement; the life of the firstborn is not forfeited, nor is the offering a sin-offering. A late writer in thinking of the offering of the firstborn does indeed ask: "Shall I bring my first-born for my rebellion, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" But the context shows that he is seeking to know whether the most valuable of all offerings will secure him access to the Divinity. Moreover the question is introduced only rhetorically to show that the popular conception of the sacrifices is an erroneous one. It is sometimes thought that Moses offers himself as a substitute for

⁹ Ezek. 20:25 f.

his people when he prays to be blotted out of Yahweh's book. But the context shows his meaning to be that if they are to be destroyed he wishes to share their fate. When David prays that the hand of the destroyer may be upon him rather than on the people, he means that he is in fact the guilty one, and there can be no question of substitution.

There is therefore in these cases no genuine vicariousness. And, as we have seen, the whole sacrificial system shows no trace of the idea that the animal was a substitute for the man. Only one rite which we have not yet considered might be adduced in favor of such a theory. This is the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement. But the more closely we examine the ritual the more difficult it is to suppose the idea of substitution to underlie it. The central feature is the sacrifice of one of two goats, and the sending away of the other into the wilderness. The sacrifice is a *hattath* like the others, differing from them only in that its blood purifies the inner sanctuary. The other goat is then burdened with the uncleanness which have been detached from the sacred place, and is made to carry them away to the desert demon to whom they belong. Neither animal is a substitute for a guilty man, or for the guilty nation.

The ceremony which we have just considered is unique in that it recognizes the existence of the desert demon to whom the impurities can be consigned. It is of course possible that in their origin some of the other sin-offerings may have been based on a belief in demons. But if so the belief was not at all in the consciousness of the Levitical writers. The proof is that if the animal victim had actually taken up into itself the impurity of a man its flesh would have become taboo. But these writers take special pains to inform us that the flesh is most sacred. Ezekiel commands that the *asham* and *hattath* be slain on the same tables with the burnt-offering, and that their flesh be cooked in the same pots. Moreover these offerings are actually sacrificed to Yahweh, that is, their blood is sprinkled on the altar, the fat and kidneys are burnt there. This could not be done if they had contracted the taboo of the man for whom they were offered. For the most part also their flesh was eaten by the priests though in some cases it is to be burned

outside the camp. In the latter case we may have a survival of demonistic notions, though I do not think this is at all certain.

There can be no question of substitution in those cases where the evil-doers suffer and thus relieve the community of the guilt resting upon it. The hanging of the chiefs when the people were led away by Midian turned the wrath of Yahweh. According to the other account this was effected by the slaying of Zimri and his paramour. But this means only that Yahweh is satisfied by the punishment of some of the evil-doers and pardons the rest. Saul's sons were impaled for the guilt of their father, but this was because the solidarity of the family made them partakers of his guilt. The principle of the Law is that the soul which sins with full knowledge shall be cut off with its guilt in it. The consolation of the righteous is that Yahweh will destroy the sinners out of the land, and that in the restored Jerusalem the uncircumcised and the unclean will not enter.

Only two passages, if I am not mistaken, convey the idea that the righteous may suffer for the guilty. One of these is the pathetic speech of Judah in which he offers to remain in slavery instead of Benjamin who is supposed to have forfeited his freedom by a crime. The other is the description of the suffering Servant who bore the guilt of many. This chapter of Isaiah is the culmination of a long course of reflection on the ways of Providence. The fact of the innocent suffering with the guilty when the nation was punished for its sins was too obvious to be ignored. One of the Pentateuchal writers realized the problem and embodied its solution in the account of Abraham's intercession for Sodom. His solution is of course no solution, and the Book of Job which considers the same problem in a different form ends in a *non liquet*. But the Isaian author boldly affirms that the innocent suffer for the guilty. In the account of the Maccabaeen martyrs the same thought seems hinted at—the sufferings of the seven brothers cruelly put to death for their fidelity to the Law will satisfy the wrath of the Almighty roused against the nation as a whole. But it is difficult to say how far the narrative regards this as a real case of the innocent suffering for the guilty, and how far the author is possessed by the old notion of solidarity, according to which the guilt of the community rests on all its members.

The idea of substitution is sometimes thought to be contained in the phrase translated in some passages "bear guilt," in others, "take away guilt," and in itself capable of conveying either meaning. The unwitting sinner is said to bear his guilt until the sacrifice removes it, and, on the other hand, Saul asks Samuel to take away his sin, that is, to forgive it. When Ezekiel asserts that the Levites have been guilty in times past and adds that they shall bear their guilt, he evidently means that their degradation from the priesthood is their punishment for their unfaithfulness. But in the legal code where it is said that the Levites shall take away (bear) the guilt of the people, the apparent meaning is that by their sanctity they will purify the people. By analogy we must translate the declaration to Aaron: "Thou and thy clan shall take away the guilt of the sanctuary, and thou and thy sons shall take away the guilt of your priesthood." The parallel says that the plate of gold bearing the inscription "Sanctity to Yahweh" shall be on the forehead of Aaron and "Aaron shall take away the guilt of the sacred things which the sons of Israel shall consecrate in all their sacred gifts, and it shall be always upon his forehead that they may be accepted before Yahweh." There is here the same idea of purification which we have found to underlie the sacrificial service. The plate of gold, having consecrating efficiency, counteracts any remaining taboo which may cling to the oblations of the people, or even to the priestly ministrations. There seems to be no case where this phrase (bear the guilt) implies substitution.

Our study has shown us that two separate views of sin may be traced in the Hebrew Scriptures. One of these is social. According to it sin is what offends another person, human or divine. When fully developed this leads to the idea that sin is disobedience to constituted authority expressing itself in a command. The other view is ritual, according to which sin is anything which makes a man unfit to approach the sanctuary. The combination of the two views came about when social regulations and priestly traditions were embodied in a written code, every item in which was regarded as an express command of Yahweh, one equally binding with another.